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Wide Interest in Women's Inquiry

by Ruth Blake

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women has received 285 briefs, reports its chairman, Mrs. John Bird. This is a significant response — only the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism has had more submissions. What does this reflect?

It is hard to make too many predictions, with the contents of the briefs still unknown. But one thing is certain: as always, the question of the position of women in society has aroused interest and controversy. No woman is chaining herself to a fence these days to call attention to her rights. And it seems incredible, when you see the soft little pussy cats in the ads, or the inflated, wide-eyed dolls in the movies, to remember that members of the same sex once risked death itself to earn the vote. Many such reforms that were fought for have been won. But the 285 briefs are recognition that a problem still exists, as is the very existence of the Commission.

As the date for the Commission's public hearings approaches, more and more relevant material is appearing in Canadian newspapers and magazines. Women are interviewed on the campus, at home, in offices; the opinions of dignitaries are solicited. "I believe most women do not want to be equal." "Women are their own great enemies." "Here's your chance men! Where is a women's place?"

Jocular, condescending and frivolous comments predominate. But at the same time, other viewpoints are emerging, showing how society hurts woman, and how woman, in turn, gives less than her best to society because of her inferior conception of herself. An article on women teachers in the Toronto *Star* is a particularly clear exposé of this vicious interaction.

Most of us would agree as to the vital importance of good teaching.

But how can society demand dedication from its woman teachers when at the same time they have been told since babyhood that their place is in the home, and when at every turn it is obvious that the system doles out its rewards on the basis of sex, not effort and ability? In Toronto, of 108 school principals, only 9 are women. There are no women school inspectors. "School positions get filled at Rotary and Kiwanis meetings," says the Woman Teachers' Federation, with understandable bitterness.

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women will uncover many similar vicious circles in Canadian society — all a reflection of how profoundly the myth of feminine inferiority is embedded in the social order and the damage that it does. This is only one of the reasons why people are still excited and concerned about woman's status — only one of the reasons why socialists must present their program for women.

Don't miss our next issue, which will include a special two-page insert with the text of the submission by the League for Socialist Action/ Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière to the Royal Commission, together with a feature article on the role of woman in capitalist society.

—Ed.

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Socialist View Wins Applause

A Wage for Mothers?

by Kate Porter

"It is the concept that reforms alone are not going to mean full equality for women that sets our brief apart from others," the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was told in Toronto. Ruth Tate, co-author of the League for Socialist Action brief, presented the brief to the Commission on June 4. She expressed the hope that the findings of this Commission would not be shelved like others before it.

"We of the League for Socialist Action demand day care centers to free women from full-time child care; equal work opportunities for women; and free abortions on request."

"However, she said, "it's going to take a profound social change to remove once and for all the discriminations and prejudices against women in our society. It's mockery to speak of freedom for women in a society which is not free. Only a socialist society can finally free women . . . and men."

The LSA brief aroused considerable interest in the audience of about 75 women. It drew the first applause of the evening, and many sympathetic remarks, where earlier presentations had been greeted with silence. The hearing came on the second day of the Commission's five-day stay in Toronto. The sessions generally drew about 100 women, who had plenty to say about their status in Canada today.

One of the members of the LSA briefing committee, Ross Dowson, called for a wage for housewives "to free them from financial dependence, so that they can decide their own relations with their husbands and children." The income of a husband would be irrelevant in determining how much his wife was to be paid. A burst of applause followed his remarks.

The LSA brief also dealt with the discrimination against women in work. "The federal government has recognized the concept of equal pay for equal work. Yet in some provinces the law actually condones wage inequality between men and women. Even where equal pay legislation is on the books, women receive substantially lower wages for doing the same work as men. While the trade union movement is in the forefront of this struggle, it has not yet won it."

Joan Newbigging, also on the LSA briefing committee, demanded government legislation to end discrimination against women in education. "There is something very wrong," she said, "with the way women are deliberately directed away from the scientific and mathematical fields."

In the all-too-short plenary session which followed the hearing, women in the audience expressed sympathy with the demands put forward by the LSA brief. "You can call this brief radical if you want," said one woman, "but everything in it women have been wanting for years."

WOMEN'S RIGHTS. LSA brief to Royal Commission on the Status of Women got a good response from audience at Toronto hearings. Ruth Tate (inset) presented the brief.

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Legalize Abortion, Panelists Demand

The government Royal Commission on the Status of Women has revealed one thing at least — many years after winning basic legal reforms, Canadian women are still not satisfied with their position in society. A flurry of meetings, discussions, and articles has followed the commission hearings across the country.

Three days before the hearings opened in Toronto, the Vanguard Forum held a special discussion on Woman Today. The meeting drew over 125 people, mostly women, who had a great deal to say about women's inferior status today.

Anne Davidson, liaison officer of the Association for the Modernization of Canadian Abortion Laws, called for legalized abortion on request. She charged that society directs women into rigidly defined sex roles, and that a woman's sole purpose in life is supposed to be bearing and raising children.

Ruth Tate, co-author of the League for Socialist Action brief on The Status of Women Today, charged that the second class citizenship of women is "part and parcel of capitalist society." Women, she said, form a reserve of cheap labor, to be moved on and off the labor market according to the economic needs of the moment. They are channelled into low paying, low status jobs. They are tied by a thousand strings to their home and family, where they are expected to raise their children to fit into a profit-motivated society. Any gains they may make are as often as not taken away.

Panel chairman Jacquie Henderson, of the Toronto Young Socialists, described the discrimination against young women in Canadian society. The educational system steers them into arts and commercial courses, and discourages them from going to university. They are denied the right to birth control so that thousands every year are forced to seek illegal abortions or enter into hasty marriages.

In the discussion that followed, women speaking from the floor demanded that the government take action to improve their situation, through such measures as providing day care centers for working mothers, free birth control for all women regardless of age, equal minimum wage laws for men and women, and an end to all job discrimination against women.

Copies of the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière brief to the Royal Commission were available at the meeting. The brief comments about such proposals as those above:

"As long as capitalist society prevails, whatever gains woman establishes, in material form and in status, are always tentative and in jeopardy. The implementation of these proposals would represent a marked advance towards removing capitalism, the social and productive basis of woman's subjugation: and at the same time take us forward to the establishment of a new society — socialism."

(K.P.)

Workers Vanguard #173 (1969)

Abortion bill insufficient

by Joan Newbigging

At long last the government is turning its attention to some of the many injustices enshrined in the Criminal Code. Amendments to the Code, now before the Commons, cover a wide range of subjects — from lotteries to homosexuality to drunken driving.

Parts of these amendments are of burning concern to millions of women across Canada. They relate directly to the right of women to control their own lives. Under the present terms of the Code both birth control and abortion are illegal.

Today, under the terms of this law, Canadian women are denied access to the advanced birth control techniques developed by modern day science, and to the relatively simple operation of abortion, as carried out in a modern hospital.

It is estimated that about 35,000 illegal abortions are performed in Toronto every year. In the U.S. it is estimated that of approximately one million illegal abortions performed annually, the death rate is from 5,000 to 10,000. The corresponding death rate in Toronto would be from 170 to 350 every year.

These are shocking figures that indicate the desperate situation in which hundreds of thousands of Canadian women find themselves every year. For various reasons unprepared to have children, they are forced either to abort themselves or to search out backroom abortionists. These may be expensive and qualified (costing from $400 to $1,000 per abortion in Toronto) or fly-by-night quacks.

But these figures do not tell of the enormous social misery that exists, of the pain and of the suffering, of the warped and shattered lives. They do not tell of the thousands of unwanted children that are born every year.

What changes does the government propose to make and how would they alter this situation? First of all the government is proposing to remove the section on birth control from the Criminal Code and place it under the Food and Drug Act, legalizing the distribution of birth control information and devices and putting advertising under government control.

The key question, however, is not only legalization but also education. Legalization itself is not very meaningful unless it is accompanied by a widespread government sponsored educational program on birth control.

Secondly on the question of abortion, the amendments call for the setting up of abortion committees which would decide whether or not a woman's health or life was endangered. On that basis alone they could authorize abortion.

The decision would be in the hands of "experts" — and, we might anticipate, all too often opinionated, conservative "experts." How many women would rather face the hazards of backroom abortions to the time-consuming and demoralizing treatment they might expect from such a committee?

Why should the state, in the form of these abortion committees, still have the right to decide whether or not a woman will bear a child? Why shouldn't the woman decide for herself?

The thousands of abortions that are performed annually point to the fact that Canadian women, on the whole, regard this as their right. And desipte all the hazards and difficulties that the government throws in their paths, they are prepared to uphold this as their right.

The amendments on abortion proposed by the government ignore this reality and, as such, will only continue to perpetuate the desperate situation that now exists.

The backroom racket will continue. Hundreds of women will still die every year trying to escape from unwanted pregnancies. Thousands of unwanted children will still be born.

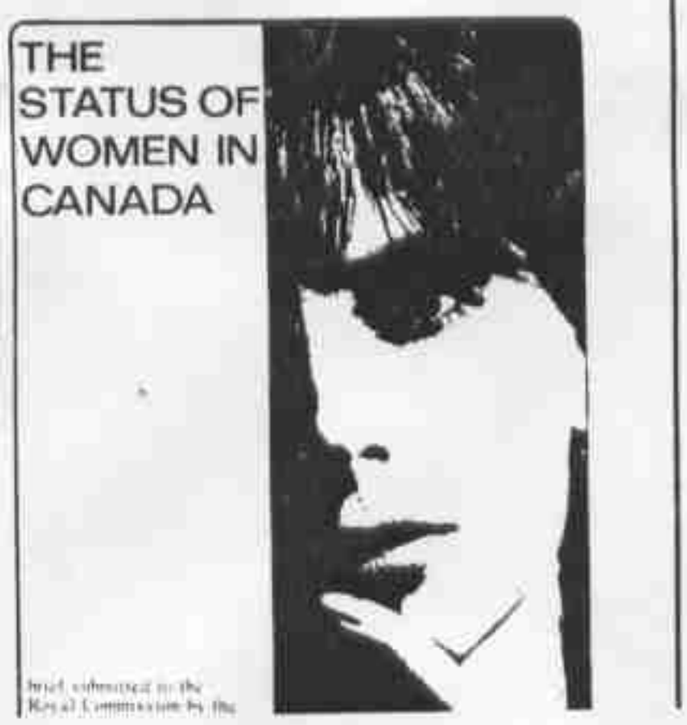
Moreover, the amendments will discriminate against working-class women. A brief presented to the Commons Health and Welfare Committee by the Canadian Labor Congress stressed how wealthier women would tend to be able to take better advantage of the committee system. The brief states, "our only conclusion is that abortion must be made available legally, upon the sole request of the woman, as the only practical method of ending much suffering, injury and disease which presses upon those of limited economic means."

Tied in with this is the need to make birth control information and devices available to all women. After legalizing contraceptive devices, the government must take the initiative to establish state-financed community birth control centres throughout the country.

There can be no talk of equality for women without the recognition of their right to control their own lives. A basic aspect of this is the right to decide whether or not to be a mother; the right of access to birth control information and devices, the right to decide to have an abortion.

The Status of Women in Canada 10

The LSA/LSO view, as presented to the government's royal commission



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#174 May 1969

The myth of woman's 'inferiority'

by Joan Newbigging

Ever since Aristotle declared that the "female nature" was "afflicted with a natural defectiveness," much more ink has been spilled on developing myths and prejudices on the inferiority of women than on any other topic.

Religion, biology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology — you name it — they've all been used to reinforce these fantasies. The holy decree commanding woman to obey her husband, the "biological theory" confining her to her role as bearer and nurturer of life, the network of "psychological facts" condemning her forever to a subservient role in society.

These myths and dogmas become part of all our lives. They change and evolve as new modes of thought and new customs develop. The crude religious dogmas are no longer as dominant as they once were. In their place the new sciences have been manipulated. But regardless of their form, they all share in common and perpetuate the myth of woman's inferiority, to provide rationalizations for the social inequality that now prevails.

Therefore it comes as no surprise that the new science of ethology — the study of the social behavior of animals — should now be used to "prove" once and for all the natural superiority of men. Based on the premise that human behavior can best be understood by relating it to that of other animals, this pseudo-scientific method of analysis has already been used to rationalize some of the more destructive features of today's world. Private property, wars, greed and selfishness, are all explained in terms of "animal nature," which is equated with "human nature."

The author of this latest thesis, Lionel Tiger and his collaborator Robin Fox, expound their views in a recently published book *Men In Groups* (Thos. Nelson, $10.00.) Their theory follows these lines. Men have a biological drive, which they inherit from their ape-like ancestors, to get together into all-male groups; through these groups they always have and always will run the world. On the other hand women are biologically conditioned, also from the ape heritage, to stay at home and look after the kids. It is unnatural for them to engage in politics, warfare, or "any matters of moment for the community."

These theories are simply a crude and slanderous variation on an age old theme. But what is surprising is that they should receive such widespread publicity and acclaim, including a feature article in the latest issue of *Macleans* magazine. Had Tiger and Fox (what appropriate names!) come up with the theory that Black or Jewish people were biologically inferior, there would have been a massive outcry of outraged public sentiment. Women, however, are considered fair game for such vicious attacks.

Why? Is there any truth in these theories that women, more than men, are governed by their "animal nature"? Why have such ideas about the natural inferiority of women held sway for centuries?

An analysis of the evolution of human society gives us an insight into these fundamental problems that no analysis of ape society, however refined, can provide. The human species with its vast intellectual and productive capacities has long since differentiated itself totally from all other animal groups. Moreover a truly scientific and historical approach explodes the myth of woman's inferiority, the view that she is forever chained by her unchanging "nature."

Tiger and the other advocates of the human nature theory ignore the vast ages of prehistory when women rather than men were the dynamic leaders of society. It was woman who invented agriculture, toolmaking and medicine, who first domesticated animals, while primitive man spent prolonged periods on the hunt in isolation from the community. It was woman who initiated the great transition from a food gathering and hunting economy to one based on agriculture and the domestication of animals — the springboard for all further progress.

This was the period in history when society was organized on the basis of maternal kinship. It was only with the advent of class society, within the past few thousand years, that the modern "nuclear" family that we know today emerged, along with private property, the state and the mythology on woman's inferiority. It was class society, not a resurgence of her "nature," that brought about the subjugation of woman.

Today woman is relegated to the role of raising the next generation of workers. In addition she is shifted on and off the labor force as the economy demands. It is the economic and social needs of society that dictate what her "nature" is — whether she is to be today's delicate and feminine housewife or the strong factory worker of World War II who filled a "man's job." Her second class status is rooted in the economic and social base of society, but it is reinforced and perpetuated by this network of myths and customs.

ROAD TO LIBERATION. In 10 years the Cuban revolution has made great strides toward integrating women into the productive process and freeing them from the home. Above, a Cuban woman in factory making pressure cookers. Below, left, a medical worker.

Indeed it is this powerful and pervasive factor that excludes women from taking advantage of many of the gains already won, that prevents them from becoming leaders in politics and industry. Tiger, with his theories on the biological inferiority of women, is only adding to this destructive arsenal of fantasies and dogmas.

Today thousands of women are awakening to the contradictions and limitations of their position. In the tradition of the great struggles women have waged in the past, they are again demanding and struggling for equality now.

As we fight to shatter the myths and customs which chain woman to her inferior position, we are struggling to destroy the system in which they are embedded. As we fight for a massive program of government financed nursery schools and day care centres, for an end to discrimination at work, for the right to benefit equally from the educational system, for the right to control our lives, we are struggling to destroy this unjust and exploitative system which has debased woman and chained her to a "second class citizenship."

In the last analysis, this struggle is one against capitalism. For we are working to build a society that knows no inequalities of race, sex or class. A society that will provide the material basis for the liberation of all — a socialist society.

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Its potential . . . and some problems

The struggle for women's liberation

by Joan Newbigging

On the weekend of Oct. 4-5 about 250 women met at a conference in Kingston, Ontario, to discuss women's liberation. Two women professors, recently fired by the administration at Simon Fraser University for their participation in the current strike, are leading study sessions on Women and Society. At the recent Miss Toronto beauty contest members of the New Feminists distributed a leaflet protesting the treatment of women as sex symbols rather than as human beings.

These are just a few examples of the radicalization that is taking place on the issue of women's liberation. This radical ferment has found its most concrete expression in the many women's liberation movements that have sprung up on and around campuses across the country. It was also expressed at the conference of NDPers which met in Toronto recently to discuss the Independent Socialist Canada manifesto.

Today hundreds of women across Canada consider themselves part of the women's liberation movement and thousands more are sympathetic to its aims.

Radicalization

This radicalization is emerging at a time when it might be claimed that women have greater freedom and independence than ever before; when the labor market and higher education are opening up to them and when a broader radicalization is taking place in Canadian society; when the student revolt, the struggle of the Québécois and the black power movements are on the upsurge; when an atmosphere prevails that nothing is sacred, that everything is open to challenge. Benefiting from, and contributing to, this atmosphere of challenge, women are now free enough to demand more. The women's liberation struggle is part of this overall radicalization.

Women's liberation groups that have emerged as the concrete expression of this struggle are still largely in the process of defining themselves; of working out their aims, their program, their relationship to political organizations and to the community, and their attitude towards action. However, we can make some generalizations about the role they play in mobilizing women and in drawing them into struggle against the system, and about the problems they face and how we can try to come to grips with them.

Common awareness

These groups cut across the isolation of women. Scattered in their homes, women tend to view the economic and psychological pressures they face as personal rather than social problems. By bringing women together on the basis of the injustices and discrimination they suffer at all levels of Canadian society, the women's liberation groups can build a collective awareness of a common problem and thereby draw women into struggle. As part of this process they help restore a new pride and dignity in womanhood and cut across the distorted image of femininity that is accepted today.

In addition they provide an invaluable forum for discussion and education on the question of woman's oppression. They provide the incentive for women to analyse their position in society, to investigate the roots of their oppression and to come to grips with its class basis. The numerous papers and articles that have been produced by the groups are testimony to this.

As well, these groups can mobilize women in actions which not only dramatize the discrimination they suffer and throw light on the nature and depth of this discrimination but can also win limited victories and thereby advance the movement qualitatively.

Most of the problems that these groups face spring from the fact that they are still a new phenomenon and are still in flux. Many problems will be resolved as the movements continue to grow in size and experience. Some, however, even now pose fundamental questions.

Potential

By and large these groups were launched by women from around the campuses who recognized that their abilities and creativity were being stifled and would never develop to their full potential in a society which confines woman to the role of mother and homemaker. It is on this level that the vast number of women are still attracted to them.

And yet potentially they can reach out to even greater numbers of women on the basis of the more direct discrimination they suffer: women confined to the clerical and service industries who receive miserable wages for alienating and exacting work; mothers imprisoned in the home 24 hours a day by the lack of day care centers; women workers who are denied an equal wage, promotions and permanent job standing because their present or potential family responsibilities make them "unreliable workers."

It is to the credit of many of the women's liberation groups that they recognize the necessity to reach into the community where possible and draw working women and housewives into the struggle. The challenge is that we must learn to relate to women on the issues that directly affect them — issues such as child care centers, equality at work, the chronic scarcity of retraining centers for women, etc. The danger is of antagonizing them by raising issues that are outside the framework of the experience of the mass of women.

This problem was raised in Toronto when a member of the Women's Liberation Movement spoke to women delegates at the recent convention of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Rather than winning them to the movement by relating to immediate issues such as job discrimination,

JOAN NEWBIGGING, Toronto aldermanic candidate is active in women's liberation movement.

she alienated them by raising highly charged questions such as marriage and the family on a level outside of their experience.

The women's liberation groups have a vast constituency and we must be careful not to set up barriers that will inhibit the mass of women from becoming actively involved in the struggle.

Society's responsibility

A further difficulty centers around the type of actions that the movement should engage in. Should the movement itself take on the resposibility of providing services such as birth control information centers, or should it demand that society provide these facilities?

This question is raised at the University of Toronto where a subgroup of the

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Womens Liberation Movement has assumed the responsibility of setting up and running a much needed child care center. But surely this is the task of the university administration — they have the resources and, above all, they have the social responsibility to provide such facilities for students, faculty and staff. It would be very valuable to carry a dramatic campaign on campus on this issue to educate students about women's oppression with the aim of forcing the administration into taking some action.

In the women's liberation groups, we must beware of dead-end actions which exhaust the meager resources of the movement rather than educating it and propelling it forward in struggle.

Why not challenge candidates at election time to put forward their program for women at public meetings? If the city of Toronto administration, the largest employer in the entire community, were to grant equal pay to its women staff, what a mighty blow would be struck thereby for women's rights across Canada!

Why not demand courses on women's studies at the universities? Why not expose beauty contests? And why not, above all, expose the hypocrisy and doubletalk of the government which is responsible for the lack of child care, birth control and retraining facilities?

Women and the NDP

Demands for day care centers, a working wage for housewives, equal pay for equal work, etc. must find a political expression in the NDP, which is the present political vehicle for the only force that can and will transform capitalist society — the working class. It is through the NDP that the women's liberation movement can establish ties with working women and the trade unions and thereby achieve much-needed stability and direction.

True, the NDP has itself been the victim of male chauvinist prejudices that are so pervasive in capitalist society. Now, however, many women in the party are beginning to challenge the concept that women should play only a secondary role in politics.

At the recent Independent Socialist Canada conference in Toronto, a number of women NDP activists met to map out a plan of action. They propose to draw up a paper on the position of women today from which a concrete program of demands will flow, and to start combatting the discrimination against women that exists in the party.

Moreover, they plan to set up a women's caucus at the party convention in Winnipeg which will be open to all women members regardless of their political viewpoint, and to call on the party to employ a full time woman organizer to strengthen its work among women.

This development will be warmly greeted by women NDPers across the country. But its significance extends beyond this because it can start to change the whole atmosphere within the party and awaken women radicals to the real possibilities and challenges that exist within the NDP — to the need to work within the NDP.

The women's liberation movement encompasses all women who are promoting the struggle for women's liberation, but it is centered around the women's liberation groups. It is within these groups that we are facing the challenge of developing an awareness of this issue, of drawing Canadian women into struggle, of trying to meet the potential that lies before this movement. Women revolutionaries, NDPers and trade unionists have a vital role to play in this process. They must establish close ties with these groups.

MEMBERS OF THE NEW FEMINISTS picketed Maclean's magazine offices earlier this year to protest male chauvinist articles about woman's "natural inferiority." They were joined by the editor's private secretary.

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BOOK REVIEW

Male supremacy a rather recent invention

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION — A MARXIST APPROACH by Evelyn Reed. Merit Publishers, August 1969. 63 pages. $1.15. Available from Vanguard Bookstores.

This new pamphlet is a collection of four essays which deal with various aspects of women's oppression and struggle for liberation.

Evelyn Reed, the author, has been a socialist most of her life and a participant in the struggle for women's liberation. She has attempted to demonstrate through her writings and activity that the injustice inflicted on women today and throughout class society cannot be separated from the exploitation of the working masses by the capitalist system, that women can only secure full freedom through a socialist revolution that frees all humanity.

Evelyn Reed believes that a tremendous task awaits the women of our revolutionary age. In making their present and future history, she states, women will have to reconstruct their past history.

Thus her first article, the text of a speech delivered to a forum of Students for a Democratic Society in Atlanta, Georgia last May, delves into the early history of humanity, in the time before class society. Her treatment relies on the work of the early pioneers of anthropology and the writings of Frederick Engels, particularly his book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.*

In primitive society, the means of production were communally owned and every member of the community was provided for on an equal basis with all others. Tribal society was self-governing and democratic: all members were equal, including women. There was no such thing as the domination of one sex over another, nor was there any no such thing as the domination of a wealthy ruling class over the working classes. The family as we know it did not exist. Tribal society consisted of a network of clans, each one composed of several brothers and sisters.

From a study of primitive society, we learn that prior to the existence of class institutions like private property, the state, and the nuclear family, the women occupied a very high position, enjoying great freedom and independence. This is in marked contrast to their subordinate and degraded position throughout this period of class society.

By means of many interesting examples, Evelyn Reed demonstrates that it was the labor of women which in fact laid the material basis for the development of civilization.

The League for Socialist Action's brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women described woman's role in primitive society in similar terms. It noted:

"It was woman who invented agriculture, toolmaking, pottery, architecture, who first domesticated animals, while primitive man, who spent prolonged periods on the hunt, was isolated from the community. This period, which stretched over hundreds of thousands of years, came to an end, not due to any inherited resurgence of an essential 'nature' of woman but due to the development of class society."

It was only with the creation of new social divisions of labor, that men gradually took over women's labor. Women were dispossessed from productive life and driven back to their biological function of maternity. "Understanding these facts of history," Evelyn Reed says, "is to explode the myth that women are naturally inferior to men."

The next two articles in her pamphlet deal with the problems that modern women face in their efforts to regain their rightful place in society. The first, Sex Against Sex — Or Class Against Class, presents the Marxist approach in fighting male chauvinism in contrast to the strictly "feminist approach." The latter maintains that all women as a sex are in the same position and have identical interests and aims regardless of their economic position and social class. The Marxists, however, while recognizing that women suffer severe handicaps and humiliation in male-dominated society and "are fully entitled to organize themselves against such evils," assert that since women's oppression is rooted in the class structure of society it is therefore also necessary for women to fight for a socialist society where the economic basis for their liberation is guaranteed in the system.

Evelyn Reed believes that the substitution of sex hostility for class struggle is a dangerous diversion that can only aid the oppressors of women and the enemies of the socialist revolution.

Finally, there is a reprint of her analysis of the book *The Feminine Mystique.* While Evelyn Reed admires the perceptiveness and pointed description that Betty Friedan makes of the sickness of society and the role it has thrust on women she feels that Friedan has failed in not providing any fundamental solutions that will attack the heart of the problem.

This pamphlet helps to expose some of the most fundamental myths about women that prevail in our society; in doing so it gives confidence to the new women radicals who seek to destroy these myths and the system that perpetuates them. It also provides the basic tools for furthering this study — it shows the method of analysis necessary in order to reconstruct the true history of women — the Marxist method.

— Christine Farrell

Discuss how to relate to workers

Colleen Levis, a leading member of the Young Socialists Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes has just completed a cross-country tour during which she spoke to 500 students on 12 campuses from Montreal to Vancouver on "The Struggle for Women's Liberation" — a socialist view of this growing movement.

"The development of consciousness on this question is evident across the country," she reports. "This was indicated both by the response to the YS/LJS tour and in the growth of independent women's groups on almost every campus I visited."

The average meeting drew 40 to 50 people, both men and women. In Saskatoon, there were over 100, and the discussion there centered particularly on the link between women's fight for rights within capitalism, and the necessity for socialism to liberate not only women, but the whole of humanity.

Some of the key questions raised in all meetings, Colleen Levis says, "dealt with how we as student women can relate to working class women, and there was much debate over the Young Socialists' proposals for a state wage for housewives and for women's studies departments in universities.

"Almost everyone agreed that women's oppression arises from capitalist society rather than individual psychological problems. The need for birth control, abortions, day-care centers and equal rights for women at work were also accepted with little question."

She adds: "It is obvious from the tour that one of the major weaknesses of these groups is their lack of coordination and the lack of a program and plan of action to link up with working class women. But the tremendous potential of this growing movement is also obvious — especially in the context of the rising radicalization of youth around the world."

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Put profits before safety

Drug monopolists hiding the truth about the Pill

by Jacquie Henderson

Who knows the truth about The Pill? Does it cause cancer, loss of sex drive, miscarriages, deformities, blood clots, diabetes, artery disease, or the hundreds of other frightening side effects that are being attributed to it by some doctors? Are women to have three heads, no breasts and two wombs by the time we're fifty, in order to have some control of our bodies today? We don't know. And if the big drug monopolies have their way, we'll never know — until it doesn't matter any more.

When doctors who had helped develop the birth control pill testified this month at a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing, they said that drug firms pushed the "hasty exploitation" of the Pill despite "inherent risks." Dr. Roy Hertz, who helped develop the first oral hormone compound, revealed that when estrogen — the hormone used in most brands of the Pill — was used in chickens to fatten them, it was linked with cancer. The government immediately took these chickens off the market.

But the same hormone is used in about half of the birth control pills taken by nine million American women and hundreds of thousands of Canadian women! And it has been approved by both governments.

Hertz told the senators, "Daily ingestion of the Pill gives much more substantial and considerable exposure (to cancer) than occurs in poultry, neither of which I would recommend." He suggested abortion would be a better means of birth control than the Pill.

Other doctors and researchers have testified about the dangerous side effects of the Pill. Most doctors are more hesitant. Dr. Robert Kistner of the Harvard medical school says reports linking the Pill to cancer are "inconclusive." But while the drug com-

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DRUG MONOPOLIES TO BLAME. Christiane Allary (above) was one of thousands of children born maimed when thalidomide (a pregnancy pain-killer) was shoved onto market before it was properly researched. Now doctors reveal that birth control pill, a great step forward in giving women control of their bodies, may lead to cancer, owing to inadequate research by irresponsible profit-obsessed manufacturers.

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panies continue their leisurely investigations into the possibility that the Pill causes cancer, millions of women are serving as human guinea pigs!

On January 19 the Canadian government banned the mini-pill manufactured by Syntex because it produced cancer in dogs. In banning it they revealed that they were testing it on 300 Canadian women at the same time as they were testing it on dogs. The *dogs* got too much cancer so the government worried. How many other birth control pills is this true for?

The few facts that have leaked out suggest that the pill in its present unrefined state could be maiming thousands of women. Yet nothing is done. We don't even have access to the facts. The doctors themselves have only those "facts" that are palmed off on them by the drug companies. And this advertising bears a suspicious resemblance to the "cigarettes are good for you" advertizing of the tobacco companies.

The risk is high. But, reply the medical men, the drug companies, the government — so what? Are you suggesting women go back to pre-Pill days? A Toronto doctor who has done research on the Pill justifies the Pill on the basis that without it women would have to resort to kitchen table abortions.

Like it or lump it, women! Any way you look at it, the alternatives are pretty dismal. There is no assumption that women have a *right* to health; a right to know that the birth control method they use is perfectly safe.

The Pill — the first 100% sure birth control method, marked a great step forward, finally giving woman some control over her biology. But after ten years using the pill — ten years! — its side effects are still improperly researched. Women have no guarantee that in taking the pill they aren't

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Must develop safe form of birth control

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endangering their future health or even that of their unborn children. They have only one guarantee — that the drug companies will continue to make as much profit out of them as possible.

The answer of women should be to throw the cynicism of the companies and the medical profession back in their faces. We don't want a choice of poisons — we want control of our bodies! We want a completely safe birth control method. We won't be the guinea pigs for a multimillion dollar business that is too profit conscious to find a safe method.

We have seen in the past how the drug companies caused thousands of children to be born maimed when they shoved thalidomide onto the market before it had been properly researched. How many other drugs pose similar threats to this and future generations?

The drug monopolies' racket must be halted immediately. They should be nationalized. Only then will they be freed from the considerations of profit that they put before the considerations of health. The government must open an inquiry into the Pill without delay. The facilities of modern science must be turned to developing a completely safe and acceptable means of birth control, whether it be a perfected pill or another method.

When the U.S. state department decided to land a man on the moon, they called on all the best scientific resources from around the world. With a lot of money and the top scientists in the field, they did it. Surely the lives of millions of women deserve the same kind of effort!

But in the meantime women must have access to an alternative foolproof form of birth control. Free legal abortions, which should be a right for women all the time, must be available for all women who choose this method of birth control. Hospital services for abortions must be drastically expanded to handle the requests of these women.

Women who have enjoyed the freedom the Pill has granted them can't shut up about the scandal that has been revealed. We won't be satisfied with half-way measures. We demand this problem be resolved — now!

Spray causes birth defects

The Canadian and U.S. governments are using an extremely dangerous chemical to defoliate a 20-foot strip of forest along the "undefended" border.

The chemical — 2, 4-D — can cause birth defects similar to those caused by thalidomide. It is the same type of defoliant the Pentagon has used extensively in Vietnam, where the number of deformed births is increasing so dramatically that the Saigon government refuses to release data on malformed births.

The National Cancer Institute and the American Association for the Advancement of Science have both condemned the use of 2, 4-D in Vietnam, citing evidence that the chemical causes deformations of the human embryo. The chemical has been banned from use in the United States by President Nixon's scientific adviser. But External Affairs Minister Sharp said on Jan. 13 that he is "satisfied" there is no danger to the environment from the extensive sprayings now being carried on along the border.

The Voice of Women, through its president, Muriel Duckworth, has demanded the government stop its plan, which it describes as an "incredibly short-sighted and risky program."

One U.S. Senator who has protested the plan, Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, says "in effect we are creating a North American demilitarized zone, a sort of environmental disaster strip in the midst of some of the most magnificent wilderness country on earth."

But it's not just wilderness — it's known that the strip will cut across at least a dozen towns in Vermont alone. How many population centers in Canada, too, are threatened by this deadly spray?